

MEMORANDUM

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FROM: Susan Sylvester, Chief, Water Control Operations Bureau
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DATE: June 18, 2014

SUBJECT: Operational Position Statement for June 17-23, 2014

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is responsible for managing Lake Okeechobee water levels and makes operational decisions about whether to retain water or release water based on their regulation schedule release guidance (2008 LORS). The USACE makes this decision taking into account the best available science and data provided by its staff and a variety of partners, which includes the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD).

The SFWMD team has discussed the system wide environmental conditions, the water supply conditions, and has evaluated the overall status of the water management system. Detailed reports are available at the SFWMD's [Operational Planning](#) internet page.

Recommendation to the USACE

The SFWMD recommendation this week is for zero releases from Lake Okeechobee at S-77, consistent with the Lake Okeechobee Adaptive Protocols (AP) release guidance. The Lake stage is within the Baseflow Subband and the 2008 LORS guidance for releases to the estuaries calls for up to 450 cfs measured at S-79, and up to 200 cfs at S-80. The SFWMD governing board directed staff to use the SFWMD's Lake Okeechobee Adaptive Protocols (AP) release guidance as the basis for S-77 release recommendations to the USACE when the lake stage is within or below the Baseflow Subband. For the period of June 17-23 the AP guidance suggests no lake releases to the Caloosahatchee Estuary via S-77 because current and forecast salinity are below the threshold defined by the AP guidance. Details are provided on page 3. The SFWMD recognizes the USACE's desire to manage Lake stages.

2008 LORS Release Guidance (Part C): The Lake Okeechobee stage is within the Baseflow Subband and Part C of the 2008 LORS suggests "Up to Maximum Practicable to the WCAs IF desirable or with minimum Everglades Impacts".

Consistent with the LORS release guidance, the USACE is requesting the SFWMD to make Lake Okeechobee regulatory releases to the WCAs. Irrigation demands are decreasing with the onset of the wet season. STA conditions are being monitored to evaluate potential impacts of Lake Okeechobee releases on STA treatment capability and to provide input on future STA operational decisions.

SFWMD everglades' scientists recommend Lake Okeechobee releases to northwestern WCA-3A and to northeastern WCA-3A to maintain peat hydration which helps to prevent loss of peat through increased decomposition. Recession rates have been poor over the past week due to rainfall over the area and SFWMD scientists recommend maintaining recession rates between -0.05 to -0.12 feet/week if possible.

2008 LORS Release Guidance (Part D): The outcome from Part D of the 2008 LORS release guidance is: "S-79 up to 450 cfs; and S-80 up to 200 cfs". The lake stage is within the Baseflow Subband and is likely to remain within the Baseflow Subband for at least the next week.

For the St. Lucie Estuary, SFWMD estuary scientists reported that salinity at the US-1 bridge is within the preferred range and releases of freshwater from Lake Okeechobee are not recommended.

For the Caloosahatchee Estuary, SFWMD estuary scientists reported salinity conditions remain within the preferred ranges for tape grass in the upper estuary and for oysters in the lower estuary. Forecast salinity near the I-75 Bridge will remain below the 5 psu for the next two weeks, therefore no freshwater inputs at S-79 are needed to keep the 30-day moving average salinity below target.

Weather and Climate

Rainfall during the past week totaled 2.87 inches district wide (through 7 a.m. June 17th). Lake Okeechobee received 3.94 inches of rain during the past 7-days. District-wide rainfall during past 30 days totaled 5.48 inches (89% of average). During the past week rainfall recorded for the Upper and Lower Kissimmee Basins was 3.71 and 3.64 inches, respectively. For the past 30 days the Upper Basin received about 103% of average rainfall, while the lower basin received about 121% of average rainfall.

The SFWMD weather forecast for the upcoming week is for average to above-average rainfall. For week two, the forecast is uncertain and is for below-average rainfall. The available (31-May) Climate Prediction Center (CPC) outlook for June indicates increased chances of above-normal rainfall for central and southern Florida. The available (15-May) CPC outlook for all the three-month windows for the wet season indicate equal chances of below-normal, normal and above-normal rainfall for central and southern Florida. Longer-range CPC climate outlooks for parts of the 2014-15 dry season indicate increased chances of above-normal rainfall associated with the forecast for an El Nino event.

Current Conditions and Operations

The June 16, 2014 Lake Okeechobee stage (reported by the USACE on June 17th) was 12.61 feet NGVD, 0.28 feet higher than last week. The Lake stage is about 0.25 feet lower than a month ago and is about 1.3 feet lower than one year ago. The June 16th stage was about 0.6 feet below the historical average for this date. The stage has now risen into the Base-Flow Subband of the 2008 Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule (2008 LORS).

Daily release rates at the Lake structures, averaged for the week ending June 17th, were estimated at about 50 cfs at S-77 and 0 cfs at S-308. At the tidal structures, average daily discharges were about 1260 cfs at S-79 and 620 cfs at S-80. The discharges at S-79 and S-80 were from local basin runoff produced from recent rainfall. Average rates during the past 7-days may differ from the target because the averaging period (Tue-Mon) differs from the implementation period. The current 7-day environmental water supply release per the SFWMD's Lake Okeechobee Adaptive Protocols release guidance will end June 19th. No Lake O environmental releases via S-308 and S-80 to the St. Lucie Estuary are recommended.

The WCA-1 stage is now 0.1 feet above its regulation schedule. For WCA-2A, the S-11B headwater stage is increased to 10.79 feet, NGVD and is now 0.3 feet above the water supply floor elevation (10.5 feet, NGVD). Water supply releases through S-38 used to balance inflows volumes from Lake O was stopped on June 11th due to the increase in stage in WCA-2A but S-38 will be used as needed for water supply. As is normal this time of the year, the marsh in WCA-2A is higher than canal stage and above the regulation schedule. The WCA-3A regulation stage (3 gage average) is slightly below the bottom of Zone E1; and the S-333 headwater stage is now 8.3 feet, NGVD which about 0.8 feet above the water supply floor elevation (7.5 feet, NGVD). Currently water supply releases from WCA-3A do not require preceding inflows from Lake Okeechobee.

Releases from WCA-1 and WCA-2A to coastal Palm Beach and Broward Counties are now being reduced as the area is now receiving more rain, but release will continue as needed. S-333 and S-334 are currently closed but will be opened if needed to help maintain canal stages in the South Dade Conveyance System (SDCS). All WCA primary discharge structures (S10s, S11s, and S12s) are now closed. Inflows to the WCAs from Lake Okeechobee will continue as needed, and consistent with the WCA regulation schedules, to supplement water supply releases from the WCAs.

SFWMD Lake Okeechobee Adaptive Protocol (AP) Release Guidance

This week the SFWMD's Lake Okeechobee Adaptive Protocol (AP) release guidance flowchart is applicable since the Lake Okeechobee stage is within the Baseflow Subband of the 2008 LORS. Projections indicate the lake stage will remain in the Baseflow Subband for at least the next two weeks.

This week the Lake O AP release guidance suggests no releases from Lake Okeechobee at S-77. This week's outcome is based on the current and forecast salinity at the Val-I75 site being below the 5 psu threshold. The specific salinity criterion in the AP release guidance states "Estuary 'needs' water when the 30-day moving average salinity at I-75 bridge is projected to exceed 5 practical salinity units (psu) within 2 weeks."

Lake O AP Background Information

The AP document included recommendations to conserve water in the beginning of the dry season when the Lake stage is in the Low Subband to ensure availability for later in the dry season when all water demands tend to be at their highest. Specific language on page 12 is shown here for convenience: "One of the fundamental tenets of adaptive protocols for Lake Okeechobee operations is to limit the 2008 LORS Low subband maximum release rate during the early part of the dry season to help conserve water and increase its potential availability for later in the dry season when the demand is largest. To implement this precept, when the lake stage is within the Low subband in the early part of the dry season, the weekly operations guidance may recommend to the USACE to limit the release volumes to no more than 50 percent of the maximum allowable. Factors that may influence this recommendation include lake stage trend, and weather and water condition forecasts."

The AP release guidance flowchart was designed primarily to guide release recommendations for circumstances when the Lake stage is within the Baseflow Subband or lower. The USACE's Water Control Plan (WCP) for Lake Okeechobee and the EAA recognizes that the SFWMD may allocate water to the environment through its "Adaptive Protocols" or other SFWMD authorities. The WCP provides guidance as to releases, including Adaptive Protocol recommendations, in the various Lake schedule subbands.

There are two primary branches of the AP release guidance flowchart. The upper branch pertains to the 2008 LORS baseflow (aka, regulatory) releases while the lower branch pertains to environmental water supply releases. It is important to recognize that the AP was developed primarily to guide the water supply balance between Caloosahatchee Estuary, permitted water users, other water supply purposes of the water control system, and the Lake O MFL Rule. The water supply balance achieved by following the AP release guidance was evaluated by the Water Resources Advisory Commission and the SFWMD Governing Board, leading to board acceptance in September, 2010. [Final Adaptive Protocols for Lake Okeechobee Operations \(September 16, 2010\)](#).

For additional information pertaining to operations history and past recommendations, refer to the archives of LORS-2008 Release Guidance outcomes and operational position statements at www.sfwmd.gov under the Operational Planning topic.